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Detained Agriprocessors workers fight back in court

JEFF REINITZ, Courier Staff Writer

CEDAR RAPIDS - Attorneys for three people arrested during Monday's Agriprocessors raid have asked the court to bar immigration officials from moving detained workers out of Iowa.

Amy Peck, an Omaha, Neb., attorney, is representing Antonin Trinidad Candido, Roman Trinidad Candido and Maria Refugio Masias both individually and on behalf of the detained employees.

In court records, Peck said her clients and other workers are victims and witnesses to "exploitative practices" at Agriprocessors and could be granted visas.

"As victims they would need to participate in the investigations of the alleged crimes and may be needed to testify as to person experiences," Peck said in the writ of habeas corpus submitted Thursday in U.S. District Court in Cedar Rapids.

In conjunction with the writ, another attorney, Sonia Parras Konrad, who is representing 34 detainees submitted a written statement spelling out some of the allegations against Agriprocessors.

"Through the course of my interviews with the detainees, I have received reports of what appear to be substantial violations by Agriprocessors Inc. of Federal law including wage, labor and immigration violations," Parras Konrad said in the statement.

She said workers told her the company provided false identification and employment eligibility documents for employees, withheld \$50 from their checks as "immigration fees," and subjected them to physical abuse.

The workers told her they weren't properly compensated for overtime and weren't allowed to use the rest room during 10-hour shifts, according to Parras Konrad's statement.

As for those detained by immigration officials, two nursing mothers weren't provided breast pumps for 48 hours to relieve discomfort, the writ states.

Del Refugio Masias and her husband, who is also detained, haven't told of the whereabouts of his children, ages 2 and 5.

Antonin Trinidad Candido is a minor, according to the filing.

The complaint also said some of the workers have spouses and children who are United States citizens and may be eligible for immigration relief through family.

It asks the detainees be released or allowed a reasonable amount of time to meet with their lawyers before being transferred out of Iowa.

Peck couldn't be reached for comment Thursday afternoon.